



Lazy VJ Farms

Growing up, Rod Vorhees' father taught ecology at local school. Although he didn't realize it at the time, Rod was essentially immersed in an ecology class at home on the farm while he worked with his father, preparing him for a career dedicated to the family farm and conservation. Today Rod manages Lazy VJ Farms, his family's fourth generation cow/calf ranch in Fredonia.

When Rod began taking on a leadership role at the farm and purchasing neighboring land in the 80s, he was eager to focus on improving land health. He converted all land with tillage history to permeant vegetative cover using cover crops, and established cool season plant communities that would complement the native prairie ecosystem and extend the time of available quality forage.

The pastures on the ranch are managed using rotational grazing. Cattle are moved from one paddock to another to allow for a period of rest and regrowth. The cattle are also rotated to different ecotypes throughout the year to help provide quality nutrition. Rod strives for optimum production rather than maximum production, and always does his best to also provide care for the often-forgotten components to land management such as nongame wildlife, pollinators and migrating species.

The abundant plant diversity on the ranch provides excellent wildlife habitat. The property has 2,000 continuous acres that includes cool and warm season varieties of native and introduced grasses, forbs, legumes, native timberland and riparian areas. Although Rod accommodates a small number of hunters on his land, he does not need to plant food plots to make the land an attractive place to hunt due to the plant diversity that brings in the game.

Rod believes no generation can precisely predict what changes future generations will encounter. He recognizes that it will be important for the next generation to be educated about the nuances of conservation and land management in order for the business to continue into the future. Working with his son Tom and his grandson has given him the opportunity to instill the land ethic his dad gave to him, giving him some peace of mind that his son and grandson will make good management choices in the future.

"Rod lives Leopold's belief that conservation is a state of harmony between men and land," said Daryl Donohue, rancher. "From burn schools for ranchers to water festivals for school kids, and from wildflower tours attracting urban dwellers to educating state and local officials, he has created and sustained programs that bring a love and understanding of the natural environment to people who might otherwise be oblivious to its importance.

